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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 05 SHANGHAI 007137

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SUBJECT: SHANGHAI ELECTIONS--A MIX OF PAGEANTRY AND FICTION

REF: A) BEIJING 24246

SHANGHAI 00007137 001.2 OF 005

CLASSIFIED BY: Mary Tarnowka, Policial/Economic Section Chief,
U.S. Consulate, Shanghai, Department of State.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: Despite efforts to portray them as paragons of democratic virtue, three contacts descriptions of Shanghai's district-level People's Congress elections reflected little more than choreographed political pageantry. Congenoffs visited elections in two separate Shanghai districts, Minhang and Jing'an. In both cases, event organizers went out of their way to provide well-rehearsed answers designed to demonstrate their districts' openness. However, unintentional holes in the script showed through--the public nature of the "secret" voting booths, a vote being miscounted in favor of the frontrunner, or voters stuffing the ballot box with more than their allotted number of proxy votes--giving some insights on just how far the process still has to go to be considered truly democratic. End summary.

The Election Process: Democratic...

¶2. (C) On December 10 and 12, more than 10 million votes were cast at more than 43,000 polling stations throughout Shanghai to elect 5,033 district-level and 7,993 township-level People's Congress representatives. Shanghai Municipal People's Congress researcher Zhou Meiyan on December 5 explained the nuts and bolts of the election procedures. According to Zhou, a list of registered voters was published 20 days prior to the election. Five days later, a list of "preliminary candidates" (chubu houxuanren) was due to the district election officials. Candidates could be added to the candidate list when at least 10 persons nominated an individual who was at least 18 years old. Zhou said that work units' managers could also nominate candidates and that the local party committees directly added a large number of candidates to the list.

¶3. (C) The preliminary candidate name list typically contained many more candidates than would be allowed for the number of People's Congress seats available. National law stipulated that there must be at least 30 percent more candidates than seats, but that there could be no more than 50 percent more candidates. In Qingpu District, for instance, the preliminary

name list had about 3,000 candidates while there were only 300 candidates allowable for the formal ballot.

...to a Point

14. (C) Zhou said that the preliminary candidates were whittled down by a non-transparent "voter small group" (xuanmin xiaozu) process. The party committee in each voting district organized several small groups to decide which candidates to cut. If the small groups were unable to agree on a slate of formal candidates, national law dictated that a preliminary election be held. However, there had never been a preliminary election held in Shanghai because the districts found them "too much of a hassle." Zhou said it was easy to avoid a preliminary election since the party controlled the selection of the small groups and the public was kept intentionally uninformed.

15. (C) Zhou, who works at the municipal government building, said that there were 30 preliminary candidates in her building (Note: The municipal government building is considered one voting district. End note.). She said that the small groups in her building had trimmed the list down to six formal candidates. However, neither Zhou, nor any of her superiors knew how the final name list had been chosen, nor were they aware of who served on any of the small groups. The only person on the preliminary candidate name list that the Municipal People's Congress staff had nominated failed to make the final cut.

16. Although it was technically possible for independent candidates to run (i.e. candidates who had put their own name forward rather than being nominated by someone else), none had ever won in Shanghai. The small group process effectively weeded out non-approved preliminary candidates. Moreover, since the Party controlled the propaganda apparatus, it was next to impossible for independent candidates to reach the voters. Zhou said that she and Professor He Junzhi, who ran the Fudan University Voter Research Center, were aware of only three persons who had put themselves forward as independent candidates

SHANGHAI 00007137 002.2 OF 005

this time around, although Zhou thought there might be a few more.

17. (C) Zhou said that five days prior to the election, the formal candidate name list came out. Although campaigning, as such, was not allowed, constituents were "encouraged" to meet potential representatives at scripted "meet the candidate" (jianmianhui) events. Zhou noted, however, that the times for these forums were often limited and inconvenient. For instance, the only chance for her to "meet the candidate" in her district was scheduled for 2:00 PM on a weekday, making it next to impossible for anyone who worked to actually meet any of the candidates for whom they were supposed to be voting. During a December 20 discussion, Zhou clarified that there was no law that explicitly forbade campaigning. Neither, however, was there a law that explicitly allowed it. Election officials erred on the side of caution and took an absence of approval as an implicit prohibition.

18. (C) Zhou said that one of the biggest problems with the elections was proxy voting. She said that because of the large movement of people within China, most voting was done via proxy. She said, for instance, that if a migrant worker in Shanghai wished to vote, they needed first to return to their official "hukou" residence and file paperwork with their local election officials stating that they wished to vote elsewhere. Since most migrant workers could not afford a trip home for that purpose, most relied on their family members to cast their ballots for them. However, this method often led to voter fraud, with one person voting multiple times, regardless of what the proxies' wishes were. Moreover, since in order for an election to be "legal" it required a certain turnout percentage, election committees would often "help" voters who had not voted by the time the polls closed by casting ballots for them.

¶9. (C) During a December 6 discussion, Fudan University graduate student and recently inducted party member Lu Lei described the process of selecting preliminary candidates at the School of Journalism. The Journalism School was divided into three classes and her class, composed of third-year students, occupied eight different apartments. She said that on November 27 at 9:00 PM her class president sent a message to everyone that there was a mandatory meeting that evening at 10:00 PM. When Lu and her classmates showed up, they were divided into "small groups" according to apartment and were told to elect a "small group leader" to lead the voting in each group.

¶10. (C) They were then told that each class needed to put forward a candidate for a December 12 event. None of the students or candidates knew what the event was--Lu only later found out that it was the Yangpu District People's Congress elections. The class president said that the name list of representatives was due the following afternoon and they needed to finish the process that night.

¶11. (C) Several small groups tried to nominate people who did not show up for the meeting as punishment for not sharing in the tedium but were reprimanded by the class president for not taking the process seriously. After each small group chose its preliminary candidate, the whole class voted to put forward one preliminary candidate from the entire class. Lu did not know how the compiled list of preliminary candidates from the various university classes was narrowed down further.

¶12. (C) Lu said that neither she nor any of her classmates took the meeting seriously, chatting and eating dinner--many in their pajamas--while they were supposed to be discussing whom to nominate. Students who were nominated by and large were not happy at having been selected. Lu had initially been nominated as a candidate and was elated to have lost to someone else. She said that students' attitudes had changed since the 1989 Tiananmen protests and that no one she knew was interested in politics. Students today were concerned with personal issues, not systemic change. (Note: Lu is the only student Poloff has met who has openly discussed doing independent research on Tiananmen, knows of the brutality of the crackdown, and is able to name several of the student leaders of the period. End note.)

Unscripted Election Anecdotes

SHANGHAI 00007137 003.2 OF 005

¶13. (C) During a December 14 discussion, Fudan University graduate student Chen Daowen said that on election day, students were told to report to certain classrooms at prescribed times based on department. Students were told they were required to cast a vote and faced criticism from professors or school party leaders if they failed to show up. She had no idea how the candidates had been selected. Chen said that the students were also given instructions on which of the two candidates they should vote for--a female PhD candidate named Feng Ai. Chen said that for the previous week, the university had run a propaganda campaign for Feng, completely ignoring the other candidate. Chen could not even remember his name.

¶14. (C) She said that there were no "secret ballot booths" in the polling place, just a large table where students could mark the candidate of their choice or write in the name of someone else. Since most of the students did not know anything about the candidates, they either selected the person they had been instructed to vote for or wrote in their own name. Feng Ai, unsurprisingly, won the election with over 70 percent of the vote.

¶15. (C) Zhou Meiyan said that since this year Shanghai decided that persons could vote in their home district if they did not want to vote in their work unit, she chose to vote in Hongkou.

Much to the chagrin of local election officials who knew where Zhou worked, she remained at the polling place to observe. She said that she saw many people stuffing the ballot box with 13 or more proxy votes; election officials assured her that they were simply helping family members. She also observed election workers telling voters--particularly but not limited to illiterate voters--which candidate they ought to vote for.

Minhang: "Exercising Our Patriotic Authority as Citizens"

¶16. (C) On December 12, Poloff accompanied by FSN Assistant visited a polling place in Minhang District, one of Shanghai's most socio-economically diverse districts with large "rural" and migrant populations. Congenoffs were greeted by Ms. Cheng Heqing, a member of the local Residence Committee and a member of the Election Committee. They were led to the second floor of the Residence Committee building where there were about 100 voters milling around outside a large, unheated conference room that housed roughly another 100 voters and volunteers. After being escorted inside, Congenoffs listened to voting officials explain the rules on how to fill out the ballots and watched as two ballot inspectors opened the large red box that was on a table on the platform in the front of the room to demonstrate that it had not been stuffed before hand. They then sealed the box with two hand-painted calligraphy couplets to demonstrate it would not be tampered with during the proceedings.

¶17. (C) Voters were then encouraged to come forward to cast their ballots. Most made use of the three "secret ballot booths" set up along the wall. These booths consisted of a small table partially surrounded by a red curtain. Voters, often three or four at a time, crammed into the "private" booths with curious onlookers peering over their shoulders to see for whom they were voting. At one point, a loud argument with some pushing erupted at a booth near Congenoffs. Election officials assured Congenoffs that it was caused by the lack of space and people's enthusiasm to exercise their patriotic duty.

¶18. (C) A large table was set up next to the booths for people who did not want to vote in private or needed assistance reading the ballot. Poloff estimated that approximately 60 percent of the voters utilized the private booths while 40 percent filled out their ballots in the open. Voters were all required to file up one by one, in the sight of the election officials and anyone who wanted to watch, and to ceremoniously place their unfolded ballot in the ballot box.

¶19. (C) Voting commenced at approximately 9:40 AM and lasted until 10:30 AM when the ballot box was opened and the votes counted. When asked why the poll was only open for one hour, Cheng informed us that people unable to come could have a relative cast a proxy vote (weituo piao) for them. Prior to the voting, Cheng informed Congenoffs that approximately 550 people were going to vote, with 400 voting in person and 150 via proxy vote. Cheng said that each voter could cast his or her own ballot and up to three proxies, provided the voter could produce the voter registration card of each person for whom they were casting a ballot. It appeared, however, that only 150-200

SHANGHAI 00007137 004.2 OF 005

people actually attended in person, while the majority of votes were cast by proxy. Poloff did not see anyone examine the registration cards for proxy votes. However, no one appeared to be trying to cast more than their quota of votes.

¶20. (C) When the voting finished, the poll workers broke open the ballot box and dumped the votes on the table, ceremoniously tearing the box apart to demonstrate that no ballots remained inside. A small group of poll workers then counted the ballots. Poloff observed that at least one ballot with a write-in candidate was marked for the leading official candidate. In the end, of the two candidates named on the ballot, both of whom were government officials, Liu Hailan beat Wang Jianguo 291 to 225, with Cheng receiving eight write in votes and another candidate receiving six. Cheng told us that the vote tally

would not be official until later that afternoon once all five polling stations in this representative district had reported and recounted. (Note. Minhang's People's Congress meeting is slated to be held February 9-13. End note.)

¶21. (C) Cheng said that there were more than 5,000 persons living within the boundaries of her polling place. Of those, only 1,300 were eligible to vote. Many of these eligible voters cast their ballots in their work units' elections and hence, did not vote at the neighborhood polling station. There were 656 voters--mostly elderly or privately employed--who were eligible to vote at this station. When asked why such a small percentage of the population were considered eligible to vote, Cheng replied that the rest were "not yet 18," which was the minimum voting age. (Comment: In an increasingly aging city, we find it hard to believe that 62 percent of the population in this polling district was below the age of 18. End comment.)

¶22. (C) Poloff was allowed to speak with one of the 15 or so voters hanging around after the majority of the voting had concluded. An older woman surnamed Wu said this was her first time voting in Minhang, having lived elsewhere most of her life. She said she had submitted two proxy votes--one for her husband who was at work, and one for her son who was currently living in Chongqing--and produced their voter IDs when asked. Wu seemed a bit nervous, and whenever she stumbled on some of the questions Poloff asked, one of the "helpful" poll workers sitting next to her would coach her on what to say.

Minhang Pre-election Activities: A "Model" of Transparency

¶23. (SBU) Cheng said that voter registration began on October 19 and lasted until the last Friday before the election. She said that theis Minhang polling district regularly achieved nearly 100 percent registration among eligible voters, saying that residents were sent frequent reminders to encourage them to register. Those that failed to register by the time the voter registration list came out received a personal visit from their building head. Mostly, the only people who did not register were migrant workers, although they were also allowed to register in Shanghai if they obtained and filled out the appropriate paperwork from their home provinces.

¶24. (C) She said that preliminary candidates (chubu houxuanren) were chosen fifteen days prior to the election. According to Cheng, there were no people who were running independently this year in Minhang. Cheng disagreed that the "voter small groups" were secretive. She explained that every registered voter was assigned to a small group. There were 15 groups in all in this polling district, with a published name list showing who was in which group. This polling district had an initial preliminary candidate name list with eight names on it. The groups met to look over the list and selected a group leader. They discussed which two candidates they wanted and the 15 group leaders would then meet to discuss their choices. The "small group leaders group" would compare notes and winnow down the list based on which candidates did not make the cut in the voter small groups. The narrowed name list would then be discussed again by the small groups, with each group again selecting its two favorites and the process would repeat until the appropriate number of names for the ballot was decided. (Comment: It is hard to believe that 657 people would hold this many meetings to select the two candidates. More likely, it would seem, the small group heads would directly choose the candidates. End comment.)

¶25. (SBU) According to Cheng, the candidates held multiple events each day for five days from December 7-11 to enable voters to learn more about the candidates. Aside from these

SHANGHAI 00007137 005.2 OF 005

events, the only way to learn about these candidates was to read a small information sheet about them taped to the wall outside of the polling area.

Jing'an: Less Scripted, Still Problems

¶26. (C) On the same day, another Poloff accompanied by FSN Political Assistant visited an election center located in Jing'an District. Congenoffs were escorted around the polling station by Ms. Jiang Wuyi, a member of the Election committee. The center was open longer than the Minhang center from 8:30 AM until 1:00 PM. According to Jiang, 2,313 people had registered in the neighborhood (Note: she did not say how many people altogether lived in the neighborhood. End note.). The names of registered voters and the candidates' biographies were posted on the walls. There were three candidates vying for two positions.

One candidate was the District Mayor and the other two were government officials who worked in the neighborhood. Jiang said originally there were four candidates, but one candidate dropped out after meeting with the election committee. She was vague about how candidates were chosen and said that the process involved the community and was overseen by the election committee.

¶27. (C) While some voters went directly to the ballot box to cast their votes, others spent time going over the candidates biographies and discussing the candidates with fellow voters and volunteers. Unlike Minhang, there was only one "secret voting booth" pushed off in one corner. Congenoffs did not see anyone use it during their visit. Poloff observed volunteers checking identification cards and giving people their ballots, although no one appeared to be checking proxy voter registration cards. Poloff also saw at least three people filling out stacks of proxy ballots--about four or five per person in addition to their own--to put into the ballot box. (Note: This was in apparent violation of the three proxy votes per person regulation. End note.) Like Minhang, the vast majority of the voters at the polling center were older. Jiang said this was not unusual since younger voters usually voted at their work units or schools. According to Jiang, to prevent voter fraud, poll workers not only checked IDs but also checked a computer system which listed where everyone was registered to ensure that people were not registered in multiple locations.

¶28. (SBU) Jiang expected voter turnout to be around 80 percent this year, a drop from last year's 92 percent. She was confident that there would be a large voter turnout because she and her team had done a lot of propaganda work to get people out to vote. Jiang said voters were well informed about the candidates as the election committee made sure that there were opportunities for voters to meet the candidates. She acknowledged, however, that her neighborhood only held one such session before the elections. One voter said there was no need for candidates to campaign since this year's candidates were all members of the community with whom the voters were already familiar. He added that having candidates who were known to the community made this year's election "more democratic." In previous years, sometimes the candidates listed on the ballots were strangers with no connections to the community. (Note: No date has been set yet for the Jing'an's People's Congress to meet. One contact who is member of the Congress said it would likely happen after Chinese New Years. End note.)

JARRETT